



2019 KALAMAZOO AREA

Excellence in Education

Student Comments on Significant Educators

Shannon Houtrouw



Mr. Houtrouw is so much more than an educator. He's a mentor who goes above and beyond for his students. I have had the pleasure to call him my teacher for three years, starting as a novice programmer and working my way up the ladder with him pushing me to be the best I could possibly be. Without him, my passion for computers would cease to exist. Mr. Houtrouw not only taught me computer science, but he also helped me discover my career. To him, I am eternally grateful.

- Jake Lane

Laurajane Van Niman



As my first and second grade teacher, Mrs. Van Niman set me on the path of academic success from an early age. She has truly stood by me throughout my life. A teacher, a mentor, and a friend, she exceeded all expectations of an educator and has shaped my personality and my future for the better.

- Audrey Rabick

Justin Ansel



Justin Ansel has been my soccer coach and the athletic director at my school. He has been a significant educator to me because he has always been there for me, he has pushed me to succeed, and do better in everything I do. He has taught me how to play soccer and how to lead while being out on a field. I would have wanted no other coach except him for the last four years.

- Branden Willis

Ashley Stack



Mrs. Stack has been the most influential teacher to me throughout high school. She has sparked my curiosity for so many subjects, directly and indirectly. Her classes were always the classes I could count on to be the most stress-free, yet memorable part of my day.

- Jonah Fleck

Reggie Walters



Reggie Walters has been an impactful and important teacher/guide to me in many ways. First, he is an outstanding teacher with an amazing ability to make learning math fun, easy and applicable to the real world. He was also there for me with tutoring help when I was struggling in an advanced course at WMU. Outside of the classroom, he has been a baseball and basketball coach who has taught me lessons that I would not have been able to learn in the classroom. Lastly, he helped me find opportunities to better myself outside of the classroom, including recommending me as a youth basketball coach for local 5th and 6th graders, something I truly enjoyed.

- Caleb Collard

Becky Cooper



Mrs. Cooper acted as my first introduction to English on a deeper level. The open discussion that she created within the classroom helped to change my perspective on English. She pushed us to question everything and think deeply about the literature that we read. Through Mrs. Cooper, I grew and changed in my understanding of the world and improved immensely as a writer.

- Rylee Meints

Brad Portis



Mr. Portis is one of the few teachers that has consistently been there for me as a mentor when I needed him, whether it be for chemistry, advice, or college help. He is a dynamic teacher who can always find unique ways to explain the content depending on the student. You can ask any one of his students; Mr. Portis puts forth the maximum effort to help others succeed and believes any and all students have the potential to be great. In my personal journey, he has played a vital role in helping me discover my passion for chemistry and desire to pursue it in the future. (1/2)

Brad Portis



He helped spark an intellectual interest I wasn't aware of and continues to help guide me in my future plans. From Mr. Portis's Chemistry and AP Chemistry classes, I have learned valuable skills I can continue to use throughout life: perseverance, collaboration, time management, and a strong work ethic. It is truly an honor to select Mr. Portis as my significant educator. (2/2)

- MiaFlora Tucci

Brad Portis



Mr. Portis has acted as a role model for students at Gull Lake High School for more than thirty-eight years. His work ethic, kindness, and passion for teaching go well beyond what is necessary for a classroom setting. Mr. Portis' ability to connect with and challenge students to reach their best potential has been a treasure to both experience and observe during my time in high school. As both a coach and teacher, he has left a positive impact on this community that will continue to manifest for years to come.

- Justin Walker

Beth Rhodes



Mrs. Rhodes has significantly impacted my education with her challenging expectations, her love for science, and her determination to help students reach their full academic potentials. She treats us as mature students and expects the same respect in return. As she has cultivated demanding courses, she ensures that we are prepared for whatever paths we intend to pursue when furthering our educations. As a kinesthetic learner, I benefit from a variety of hands-on approaches she utilizes in her classroom. Teachers like Mrs. Rhodes lead me to believe I can accomplish whatever I set my mind to and positively impact those around me along the way.

- Makenzie Wank

Katy Briggs



Throughout my life, I have been blessed with a long list of impactful teachers and coaches. In particular, my high school English teacher, Miss Briggs, has had a significant impact on my education. She has helped form my writing and analytical skills and consciously challenged me and my classmates in order to properly prepare us for higher-level college courses. Additionally, having had Miss Briggs for three years, I would like to think I have gotten to know her and her sense of humor fairly well which has made her class an especially enjoyable learning environment. I am fortunate to have such a personable teacher like Miss Briggs who takes such care in bettering her students both as students and as contributing members of society.

- Molly Harding

Phil Kilian



Coach Phil has been a significant part of my life because he has taught me a lot about the game of soccer. However, the greatest thing he taught me was how to grow up to be a man of strong character and integrity. He also emphasized the importance of eye contact and a firm handshake when meeting someone. Coach Phil taught lessons that will be beneficial to me on and off the field.

- Austin Strahan

Steve Dyk



Mr. Dyk teaches my favorite classes and he always gives funny tricks to help students remember things. He has always been honest with me about my abilities while still pushing me to be my absolute best. Mr. Dyk does really fun, interesting things in class to engage students, but he also knows us outside of the classroom, attending sports events among other things.

- Rachel Pease

Mark Cardwell



Mr. Cardwell is significant because he helped me understand math concepts rather than just memorizing them. In his Pre-Calculus class, I ended up getting a fruitful education that led me to have a significantly easier time taking Calculus. Not only did Mr. Cardwell teach Pre-Calculus well, but he also gave me significant life advice on a daily basis. I learned to trust my gut and to stop stressing about the little things in life by taking his class. Overall, Mr. Cardwell is the best teacher I've had during high school.

- Allie Al-Faraj

Colleen Chapoton



I've been lucky to start and end high school with Ms. Chapoton, from Honors Biology as a freshman to A.P. Biology as a senior. To say it simply, Ms. Chapoton really puts the life in biology. With a smile and daily joke, she captivates the classroom and inspires us to reach our greatest potential. She challenges us not only to be analytical and studious, but also open-minded and creative in everything that we do. The passion and joy that Ms. Chapoton shares with her students is something truly special. I'm grateful for the unwavering support, encouragement, and kindness she has given me. I'll always cherish the time I was able to spend in her class.

- Hannah Glass-Chapman

Linda Lee



With Ms. Lee's guidance and wisdom, I've been able to grow and challenge myself in ways that I didn't even know were possible. In her class, she knows what we're capable of, and she pushes us to recognize the potential within ourselves and turn it into reality. She won't be satisfied with mediocrity, challenging us to think deeper, listen to each other, and always, always make connections. She's created a wonderful environment, and I always walk into second hour with a smile, because she helps us find hope: in ourselves, in each other, and in our community. Confidence, discipline, resilience: all skills that I've built up within her care. She already knows she's extraordinary. I just want to make sure that everyone else knows, too.

- Mei Lanting

Tia Hohler



Mrs. Hohler is an absolute G. She's like a science superhero, fighting stupidity away from Kalamazoo. On a real note, Mrs. Hohler is my favorite teacher hands down. She not only helped me further my wisdom of biology and anatomy but also helped me further my passion for the sciences. Hohler has become like a mentor to me, who guided me every step of the way down the path of knowledge. Because of her, I found my true motivation and decided to major in pre-med for my undergraduate studies. I can still hear her voice of guidance in my head, "No Kevin, stop trying to microwave your brine shrimp!"

- Kevin Mehta

Rex Hafer



Mr. Hafer does not take the role of a normal teacher. Instead, he goes beyond the classroom and tries to shape his students into productive and positive individuals who value principles and what is right. He leaves a mark on every student that he teaches in a way that is unforgettable. I have had the pleasure of taking multiple classes with Mr. Hafer and have enjoyed them so much because of the charisma that he brings to the classroom.

- William Shaw

Valerie Krzewski



She has supported me through many times of hardships and has always given me advice to guide me. She is also always there if I ever need to talk to her and has become an important person in my life. She pushes me to become the true me and the better me supporting my goals and my future. Not only does she influence me but she also significantly influences other students which I feel deserves great recognition. She is a hard worker who has persevered through her obstacles while at the same time she has always made time for her students as well as me and I can't thank her enough.

- Suja Thakali

Jameeka Johnson



Ms. Johnson is my AP Literature and Composition teacher, and I have nominated her as my significant educator because she has not only helped me to increase my literary knowledge, but also my world view. In her class, we learn from many authors across genres, periods, and backgrounds. We have open and beneficial discussions on hard-to-approach topics such as race or gender, and I cannot stress the importance of such education enough. I am so thankful to have Ms. Johnson as a teacher.

- Tess Cowles

Matthew Porco



Mr. Porco has been a significant educator to me since I took AP U.S. History during my sophomore year. This year I took AP European History because Mr. Porco was the teacher. He always engages the students and brings up interesting topics daily in class. He goes out of his way to make the class fun and memorable for his students.

- Carter Eisenbach

Colleen Chapoton



Ms. Chapoton has been a bright spot in my senior year, as both an educator and employer. She has a great sense of humor and a positive outlook on life. She took the time to get to know me and I am grateful for her friendship.

- Robert Isacksen

Patrick Greeley



Mr. Greeley teaches Algebra 2 and French 1. Since Algebra 2 is required to graduate, many of the students he teaches struggle and they take some of their frustration out on their teachers. Instead of shutting down and becoming defensive and hostile towards these students, Mr. Greeley is always friendly, caring, and honest. Recognition often goes to Advanced Placement teachers for teaching high-level content to high performing students. I am proud to recognize Mr. Greeley as a standout teacher who helps struggling students in need of a positive influence in their school day while also preparing more motivated students for higher level math and language courses.

- Will Keller

Anne Lewis



She has given me more help, guidance, and support than any other. Through college applications and regular classroom discussion, no other teacher has been as adamant about seeing me succeed.

- Thomas Outinen

Matthew Porco



Mr. Porco was my AP American History Teacher sophomore year and is currently my AP European History Teacher. Throughout the classes of his that I've taken, he taught me many crucial skills such as time management and hard work. That extended even further my Junior year when I joined the National Honor Society where he taught me the importance of leadership and giving back to the community. He's someone who has always motivated me to not only be a better student, but a better person.

- Christian Zehner

Russ Iuni



Mr. Iuni has always encouraged me to do my best. He has helped me realize my interest in mathematics and showed me it could be my career. He has pushed me to see different areas of mathematics which only piqued my interest more. He also gave me the opportunity to be a math coach for one of his classes, sparking my interest in helping others with the subject I love. This has made me think about a possible career in teaching as well. Thanks to Mr. Iuni, I now have a better idea of how I want to further my education.

- Jordan Leh

Christine Kiel



Christine Kiel was my English teacher for three years. She taught the subject well while also leaving enough room for the student to figure things out themselves. While in her class, she was always able to pull the best out of me and allowed me to do my best work. Through her and her teaching, I have been able to find a love for literature and writing creatively. She has helped me to grow in the class room as student and as a person. Christine Kiel is one the best teachers I have ever had the pleasure to learn from.

- Christina Miller

William Klinesteker



Mr. Klinesteker is my significant educator for the numerous ways he impacted my outlook on life and the ways he challenged me throughout my 5th-grade year. First, he provided me the opportunity to advance my skills in mathematics beyond what his normal curriculum provided. He recognized my proclivity for mathematics and made the effort to tailor an advanced mathematics curriculum for me that provided the challenge that I needed to spark my love for mathematics. Along with this, Mr. Klinesteker provided a unique opportunity for all the members of our class to visit the WoodsEdge Learning Center over the course of our year to interact with the students there. (1/2)

William Klinesteker



I was fortunate enough to be allowed this privilege several times during the school year. This opportunity gave my classmates and me the insight into the talents and gifts of the students there, despite the disabilities that may confront them. I came away from those experiences being better able to appreciate the positive attributes present in all human beings. I am indebted to Mr. Klinesteker for helping me foster my talents and helping me recognize the talents of others, even when they are not readily apparent. (2/2)

- Caleb Crooks

Lisa Jepson



Mrs. Jepson has been my guidance counselor at Portage Central for the past three years, but she has meant so much more to me. While moving to Portage from out of state before my sophomore year was a challenging transition in every sense, Mrs. Jepson's thoughtful advice helped me navigate the situation successfully. She has shown me that no challenge is too big to overcome, either academically or personally. I am immensely grateful to her for introducing me to KAMSC and offering valuable insight into the college application process later on in high school. Her attentive and compassionate nature is an integral part of what makes my experience at Portage Central one to remember. Thank you, Mrs. Jepson!

- Suyash Dixit

Shannon Houtrouw



Mr. Houtrouw has not only taught me more about computer science, but he is a great friend as well. From movies to swimming, I always find myself laughing and having fun conversations with him. Thank you, Mr. Houtrouw, for positively influencing my life.

- Jack Liu

Shannon Houtrouw



Walking into the computer science room on the first day of class in tenth grade, I immediately knew where I would be spending my time in and out of class the next three years of my life. A dozen CS competitions and hundreds of programs in C++ and Java later, I want to thank the person that made me truly feel welcome in the KAMSC community: Mr. Houtrouw. In addition to formally introducing me to computer science, he first-hand noticed my spark in programming and fanned the flame until it became one of my hobbies. By passionately finding ways to help his students succeed, Mr. Houtrouw demonstrated to me the true definition of being a teacher. Moving forward, he will not only have influenced my aspirations but also inspired me in the way I pursue them. Thank you for supporting me all along the way Mr. Houtrouw!

- Saaketh Medepalli

Jim Schafer



Jim Schafer has helped me in both the classroom and at swimming. I have really come a long way thanks to him. He has helped me with the process of writing my IB extended essay and I really appreciate all he has done for me in the past few years.

- Owen Miller

Theresa Mills



Mrs. Mills has played a large role in elevating my English writing skills. She has taught me to see depth in various written works, and appreciate literature during my spare time. Her straight forward, no-nonsense teaching style was fresh to me: it was very direct and forced me to get out of my seat and improve. Something I'd never quite gotten from my previous teachers.

- Kaoru Murai

Eric Lancaster



Mr. Lancaster has not only made me apply the knowledge I have gained in class to real-life scenarios but has also taken time to help me leave my comfort zone by encouraging me to socialize with others to a greater extent.

- Hrishikesh Vaddineni

Justin Olsen



Mr. Olsen is the reason I am currently so interested in science. He is the only teacher I've had for science at Portage Northern, and I enjoy his classes and teaching style. I'm glad every year that he is in my schedule because he is a teacher I can relate to. He is a person I look up to in my school for the way he is able to balance home and work life. I enjoy my time in his class, and time in Science Olympiad, which he is one of the advisers for. Thank you, Mr. Olsen, for making my time in high school more enjoyable, helping me enjoy science, and creating an environment where I can constantly look forward to school.

- Isaac Bagley

Mike Sinclair



I've had the pleasure of having Mr. Sinclair as my teacher for the last two years, first as my physics teacher, and now as my geology and astronomy teacher. Throughout countless projects and labs at KAMSC, he has always been able to figure out exactly where my interests lie. He taught me what it means to be a hardworking student, as well as what it means to learn from a hardworking teacher. But being a good teacher is more than just working hard in the classroom; it means dedicating your life to helping others achieve their goals. The great physicist Isaac Newton said, 'If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.' Mr. Sinclair has truly dedicated his life to helping others learn, and I thank him for inviting me to stand on his shoulders and see further than I ever could without him.

- Carter Briggs

Shannon Houtrouw



Mr. Houtrouw is significant to me because he introduced my love for computer science. Before I took his class, I had no interest in CS, and now it is my favorite class and what I want to do as a career. He always pushes me to go above and beyond.

- Emma Fischell

Jeanne Friedman



When I moved to Portage from England, Mrs. Friedman was the first teacher that I met. She made me feel welcome at school and she found a place for me in the community. She genuinely cares and she has made my high school experience what it is today. She is always willing to help students with both academic and non-academic issues. She is a great person as well as a great teacher, and I am lucky to have had her.

- Nicholas Ghosh

Josh Bartz



Mr. Bartz has been my band teacher and marching band director since 9th grade. He is an outstanding significant educator because he deeply cares for his students, he teaches with enthusiasm, and he has been a great inspiration to me. Because of band class, I became a more well-rounded student, gained leadership skills, and improved my musicianship. I am grateful for his passionate teaching and motivational speeches.

- Isaac Huffman

Jessica Clark



Jessica Clark is undoubtedly a significant educator who not only engages her students through her humorous and bright personality, but also inspires them through her own passion for biology. Her empathetic and charismatic disposition is clearly conveyed to all students who cannot help but love and enjoy her class.

- Sharon Shaw

Mark Cardwell



Throughout my high school experience, Mr. Cardwell has always been a source of encouragement and inspiration. Whether learning in his class or simply spending time in his classroom after school, one can clearly see Mr. Cardwell's passion for teaching and his constant dedication to each of his students. Not only has he continuously inspired a passion within me for learning and to persevere, but his advice and encouragement over the years has pushed me to better myself both as a student and as a person. From discussions about different solutions to math problems to advice about stress management, Mr. Cardwell's role throughout my high school career has contributed to much of my success.

- Elizabeth Wang

Lori Pelton



Mrs. Pelton has had a positive influence on my life throughout high school. I had the privilege of taking Mrs. Pelton's BMA class during my sophomore year and it sparked my interest in the world of business. She also leads a freshman mentorship program and the National Honor Society chapter at my high school, both of which I am apart of. Mrs. Pelton is one of the most genuine teachers I have ever had and it has been evident throughout my time at SHS that Mrs. Pelton truly cares about each and every one of her students.

- Connor Nutt

Tracey Branch



Mr. Branch is a person of utmost integrity, whose teaching style allows all students to learn effectively. Mr. Branch is able to teach topics that students would often find challenging in an interesting way, and it is evident that he cares deeply about every student that enters his classroom.

- Joshua Wujkowski

Ben Rosier



When given the task to designate which educator was most significant to me throughout my high school career, I did not need to think for very long as the answer was obvious. Mr. Rosier has been my band director for the past 4 years and I can without a doubt say that no other teacher has helped shape me into whom I am today than himself. Having been in multitudes of bands under his direction I have learned the true value of hard work, and I have been able to experience the joy that comes when you see that hard work pay off with a rewarding performance. (1/2)

Ben Rosier



No other teacher has propelled me towards being a better version of myself than Mr. Rosier, whether it was through tough parts and auditions, or through personal talks at band camp with the leadership team. Through thick and thin, no matter how good or bad your day may be going you know when you enter his classroom that all worries can be forgotten for a time and that you can genuinely enjoy playing your instrument and having fun with friends. Having had an educator like him makes me hope that every student has the chance to take a class with a teacher as impactful as Mr. Rosier. (2/2)

- Jacob Cleaver

Rachel King



While making trigonometry an ease, Mrs. King has been able to guide me in preparation for the next crucial years in my life. By having long talks about future plans and possible routes to take, I have had more insight and clarity about not only the college I may attend but the career that I wish to take. Furthermore, her willingness to help launch a new student-led volunteer organization, Aim Higher, has allowed myself and other eager peers to have a phenomenal impact on our local community.

- Casey Hall

Virginia Ruimveld



Mrs. Ruimveld was my fifth-grade teacher, and she immediately recognized the potential within me. She pushed me to better myself, investing herself in my interest in writing. She encouraged me to pursue writing, and her influence has stuck with me throughout the entirety of my academic career. It is because of her that I became dedicated to my academics, working hard to achieve good grades. Mrs. Ruimveld has always been my favorite and most influential teacher; she was the first person who saw potential within me and pushed me to reach above and beyond for all of my dreams.

- Madeline Ritter

Kristina Porter



Over the course of my high school career, I have had Ms. Porter for three classes: Chemistry, AP Chemistry, and an Independent Study in Physiology. Ms. Porter has not only helped me succeed in the classroom but has taken personal time to help me figure out what my plans will be after high school and for that I am thankful. I chose Ms. Porter as my significant educator because of the passion that she puts into her teaching and the way she took her personal time to help me make decisions about my future.

- Tyler Vallier

